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June 17, 2008

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
United States State Department
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

I am writing to express my concerns over recent developments in Argentina that are straining its relationship with the United States. Our countries' historically close friendship is in jeopardy because of Argentina's default on its international debt obligations and the growing threat to region posed by Argentina's relationship with Venezuela President Hugo Chavez.

As you are aware, Argentina's illegal debt repudiation in 2005 cost Americans more than \$3 billion. Additionally, their reliance on Mr. Chavez creates significant national security concerns for the United States and the entire region. As a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I urge the State Department to ensure that Argentina does not continue down the path to rogue state status.

Argentina, under President Cristina Kirchner—and her predecessor and husband, Nestor Kirchner—has repeatedly turned to Mr. Chavez for financial support. In 2004, Argentina repaid ahead of schedule more than \$9 billion in low interest loans to the IMF with revenue from high interest bonds sold to Mr. Chavez. This was a deliberate act that allowed Argentina to more closely align itself with Mr. Chavez, at the expense of the United States and other western allies.

An alliance with Venezuela, a staunch supporter of anti-American regimes—such as Iran and its President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Colombia's FARC terrorist group—is not in Argentina's best interests. By repaying its debt, Argentina could demonstrate its commitment to again serving as a leader in South America, rather than as a follower of tyrants and thugs like Mr. Chavez.

It is my understanding that Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Tom Shannon recently met with President Kirchner in Argentina. We must utilize these important meetings to stress to Argentina the importance of maintaining bilateral relations between our countries and lessening its reliance on Mr. Chavez. Argentina can reduce its dependency on Mr. Chavez by paying off its international debts,

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including the \$3 billion owed to Americans. With over \$50 billion in foreign reserves, Argentina can afford to repay this debt.

Argentina is a key ally for the United States in South America. As a partner in numerous security initiatives, the United States government relies on Argentina to coordinate anti-terrorism activities in the region. As such, Argentina's alliance with Hugo Chavez poses potential national security implications for the United States. Accordingly, I am respectfully asking for an update on the State Department's position on Argentina's debt obligations and its relationship with Venezuela President Hugo Chavez. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



CONNIE MACK
Member of Congress